Understanding Library Visits: the Perceptions of Postgraduate Students on Information Services in Kashim Ibrahim Library

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Abstract

Library visits are based on Professional services by librarians with the intent at meeting an information need. This study was aimed at Understanding Library Visits from Perceptions of Postgraduate Students on Information Services in Ahmadu Bello University Library. For the purpose of this study, two research questions were postulated. Qualitative research methodology was used to gather data necessary to answer the research questions, and a purposive sampling technique to select the seven (7) interviewees from postgraduate students. A thematic content analysis was done with the aid of Nvivo software which yielded one hundred and twenty codes, five major categories and two sub-categories. The findings from the study among others revealed that postgraduate students felt the information services provided at the library as inadequate, and furthermore behaviour of librarians had an effect on the visit to the library. It was recommended amongst others that Librarians should show professionalism in dealing with the patrons by getting involved in the information search process and librarians should be approachable so as to encourage postgraduate students to revisit the library.

Keywords: Library Services, User Perception, Information Services, Library Patronage, Information Resources and Library Visits

Introduction

An important element in the scholarly work of Postgraduate students is the accessibility of information resources and services provided by libraries. Library visit is therefore essential to learning and research work of postgraduate students. However, visit to the library over the years as experienced a significant decline and it can be argued that these low visits have a negative impact on scholarly activities in general. Scholars have conducted studies aimed at improving library visits, some of whom have identified a myriad of causes, amongst which are; the amount of information sources available with information technologies (Fitzgerald, 1999), the frustration's users experience in the use of libraries besides the confusion of learning proper use of these information sources (Fister, 2013; Ozoemelem, 2009; Bunge & Bopp, 2001), and the anxiety that users face when they consider using the Library.

Librarians apply critical-thinking skills, emotional intelligence, teaching ability, and question analysis to connect the user with appropriate resources. Wofle & Drueke (2010) posit that librarians promote the library's services, interact with faculty, teach information literacy courses, collection development, keep up with new technology, create information services and conduct reference interview. These interactions between the librarian and the users is an experience that can positively or negatively affect library visits. Libraries visits provide users an opportunity to address their scholarly information needs. Studies have shown that students who visit the library tend to have better test scores than those who don't. In addition, high quality research depends on having access to relevant literatures which tells the researchers something new and places it in the context of what they already know, hence a visit to the library provides the avenue for postgraduate students to learn and access relevant information for their research work. Reference Services Review Librarians usually maintain a collection of relevant and accurate reference sources to assist users with information searches and, in some contexts, train users in reference and citation techniques (Petersen, 2013). Academic library renders essential services for postgraduate students by providing information resources and services that supports their leaning and research activities. Meeting the information needs of postgraduate students will go a long way in ensuring that they visit the library when subsequent information needs arises. However, the researchers observed over a period of six months between February to August 2017 that there was a declined in the number of postgraduate students that visited the Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) Library, this is in spite of the improved information resources in the library. This problem of dwindling library use goes back several decades, according Mellon (1986) it could be attributed to fear to approach library staff by students with library anxiety. For this study the researches choose the Durrance's Theory of Willingness to Return which deals with a user focused reference service as a means to improving the overall user's patronage. It is against this background that the researchers explored postgraduate students' perception as it relates to users' patronage of the information services at the Ahmadu Bello University Library.

Research Questions

1. How do postgraduate students perceive library services of Ahmadu Bello University Library?
2. How does *Durrance Theory of Willingness to Return* explain postgraduate students' perception on ABU Library services?

Literature Review

The literature review was centered around Library Services, Outdated Materials and the Durance theory of Willingness to return;

Library services: Library services are services provided by the library to the users. This can include instructions on how to access and use the library material. The services include circulation service, reference services, inter library loan, recommendation of library materials, photocopying/ printing, selective dissemination of information, audio visual services and multimedia section (Adeyinka, Femi Sunday & Olubukola. 2020). According to Adetoun and Sunday (2020), library services are professional tasks rendered to library users in anticipation and on demand in meeting their information needs. Managing and adapting library information services for the future users.

Outdated materials: Nelson (2007) referred to outdated or obsolete materials as materials that are judged by professional librarians to be in poor physical condition or to have become inaccurate due to changes in knowledge. Abubakar and Haruna (2010) inexorably observed that our libraries and information centres are stocked with obsolete and outdated textbooks and journals which is one of the factors affecting provision of effective information resources and services in libraries. This is in line with Modiba & Boloka (2018), study on the usage of government law libraries in South Africa, where they found that physical use of the law library was limited due to the outdated nature of legal resources contained. Being that information is awareness on a given situation or phenomenon which propels one into action and must be valid and usable. If information is valid but not usable it is said to be outdated or obsolete (Ochai, 2007).

Durrance Theory of Willingness to Return

The concept of willingness to return started as a user focused indicator of library reference success and also a qualitative study of the reference interaction from the perspective of users. During the 1980s accuracy was the key indicator or reference success (Crowley & Childers, 1970). By mid-1980 the principles had become the standard for evaluating the success of the reference transactions. Thus, willingness to return to a service librarian is attributed to the resources collection available at that time to assist user at that time with his quest. Durrance went further to explain about the concept that if librarians would increase their accuracy rate, reference service would be improved. Durrance believes that for a user to return to a librarian for the second time, this means that there was great satisfaction by the user (Durrance, 1989, 1995).

Durrance built his theory of willingness to return based on basic principles. They are; principle of approachability, principle of accuracy, principle of interest, principle of follow up and principle of search. These principles are discussed below:

Approachability: According to Durrance, librarians are expected to appear willing to render assistance, this is important for the reference service because it starts the very first contact between librarians and users. Dervin and Nilan (1986) also stated approachability behaviors such as the initial verbal and non-verbal responses of the librarian will set the tone for the entire communication process (be in a relaxed tone), and this will influence the depth and level of interaction between the librarian and the users. This helps build the foundation for a friendly atmosphere and develop an easy and creative communication, which would more likely lead to a productive result.

Interest: The librarian should be interested in each user's information need and should be committed to providing the most effective assistance. The impression that a librarian takes an interest in his query encourages the user to give more information about the reference topic and be willing to confide in him on issues which in other ways would not be told (Fritch & Mandernack, 2001). As a result, the interest which is required for librarian to take in user's each inquiry should not be put on one rather, the librarians might take it as a mutual learning experience.

Listening: The librarian should give a listening ear to the user so that the librarian would be able to understand, interpret, rephrase the question or request and ask for confirmation to ensure that it is understood. The librarian should apply well developed communication skills to ascertain the needs of users and respond to all requests with courtesy, patience, sensitivity and tact.

Search: The reference librarians are expected to perform an efficient and accurate search to provide the right answer for information seekers. During the search session librarians should involve the user on how to search with the help of the search strategy and the use of key terms. One of the reasons for people coming to the reference unit is that users believe that the librarians in the unit can provide the information sources to fulfill users' information needs.

Follow-Up: Librarians are responsible for determining if the users are satisfied with the results of the search. They are also responsible for referring the users to other sources since it is the fundamental role of the reference librarian. Schwartz and Eakin (1986) reported in their study that in reference transaction, asking follow-up question is a very significant behavior because it has the potential for allowing one to remedy lapses. Asking follow-up questions according to Bosley, Dashen and Fox (1999) is a widely used technique for increasing survey efficiency. The response to a follow-up question establishes whether or not a particular respondent has some attribute, or meets some condition, that makes it worthwhile or appropriate to ask additional follow-up questions about a particular topic (reference services rendered). Librarians in the reference unit are required to ask confirmation questions to make sure the users get what they really need and also give notification inviting them to come back for further information. Asking confirming questions may not be a reference routine procedure, but helps in follow up. Reference librarians need to employ the various strategies available to identify a user's hidden need.

Accuracy: Durrance stated that librarians need to provide accurate information possible to users regardless of the type of question. This means that they need to be up to date with the current trend. If not sure of the information needs of the user, book an appointment with the user so as to remedy the issue at hand.

In a study conducted by Eli, Einat, Limor, Moti & Knobler (2010) on Factors Influencing the Willingness of Volunteer Paramedics to Re-Volunteer in a Time of War. The study describes that services professional volunteer's play a crucial role in reinforcing emergency medical services in Israel particularly at a time of self-risk such as war. The research question asked were, what are motivational factors responsible for their willingness to return to another shift? The methodology used in the study was qualitative, case study was used as research method, using questionnaire as instrument for data collection in order to assess the satisfaction of volunteers participating in the reinforcement with regards to their physical environment, job assignment and the actual activity they were involved in. The findings of the study were, the willingness to return to do more shifts was affected by their welcome and reception at the station and the sleeping conditioning. The study recommended that the factors that contributed to the willingness of volunteers to re-volunteer should be taken into account and be properly improved by the organization they rely on.

Similarly, Jacoby (2005) assessed the Impact of Reference Services Provided to Undergraduate Students. This article described a study assessing the impact of reference services on undergraduate students and the study targeted undergraduates receiving non-directional reference assistance. The research questions were "do undergraduate students perceive the reference staff as being friendly and approachable?" "Do they learn something during the course of the reference interaction?" "Do they feel more confident about their ability to find information after the reference interaction than they did before?" Survey method was used and copies of questionnaire (print and online) and follow-up interviews were used as instrument for data collection.

The findings suggested that reference services can play a significant role in helping students become confident independent information seekers. It was recommended that friendliness of the reference staff was one of the best predictors of students' confidence in their ability to find information on their own and that reference interaction should be more effective as a means of teaching students not only about specific library resources, but also about the process of finding, evaluating, and using information

Research Methods

The research adopted a qualitative method for the study as this aided the understanding of postgraduate students on library and information services at the ABU library. The population of the study comprise the entire postgraduate students of Ahmadu Bello University Zaria. A purposively sampling techniques was used to select seven (7) persons for interviewed. Fourteen Interview sessions were conducted from the structured interview guide.

The interview session comprised of the initial interview and a follow up interview for correlation and validation of statements. The data collected was analysed using a thematic content analyses which comprised of important details and determining important themes. The responses obtained from the in-depth interview were transcribed word for word (verbatim), the transcribed data were imported into Nvivo software, coded and analyzed. The transcripts produced 120 codes, 5 major categories and 2 sub categories. It is upon these categories and subcategories that the analyses for this study were based.

Data Analysis and Discussion of Results

Perception of Postgraduate Students on Library Services in ABU
The researcher sought to understand the perceptions of postgraduate students on information service at ABU Library.
From the analyses two major categories emerged;
1.   Outdated and irrelevant resources; Inadequate resources
2.   Professional Conduct
The two categories are presented in Figure 1.
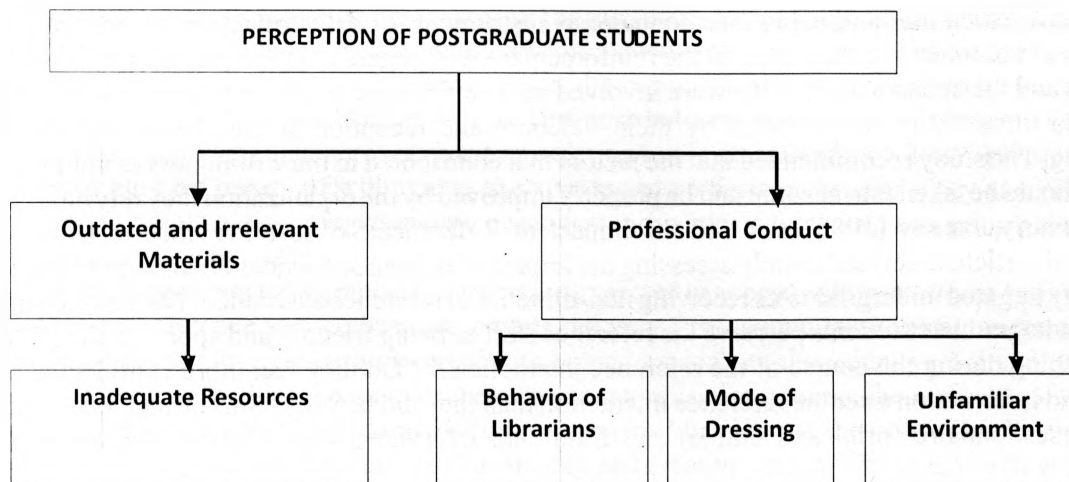
Fig. 1: Categories from the Analysis
Outdated and Irrelevant Resources: This category highlights the opinions of postgraduate students on the library and information services of ABU Library. It had one sub-category:
The responses obtained under this category showed that users deem the information service provided in the library as outdated and irrelevant. A respondent stated the preference to staying home and surfing the internet as they regarded all information gotten from the library as outdated. This implies that the postgraduates were more content with recent information resources they could obtain from the internet at the comfort of their homes. Hence respondents opting for alternative sources online, points out that resources provided were sometimes not relevant to the researcher query.
Inadequate resources: This sub-category represents narratives related to the library services and information sources provided to postgraduate students. The responses obtained showed that postgraduate students (users) viewed information resources in the library as inadequate and unable to cater for the research needs of students as noted by a respondent; "the few one's that are relevant, are never available on the shelves and always being renewed and not return".

These responses of the respondent show that his past experiences greatly inhibit his need to revisit the library as he perceived the library system as being partial in the course of service delivery.

Professional Conduct: This category reveals narratives that explain how users feel about librarians, the narrative depicts mixed opinions towards the conduct of the librarians which hinder the use of the library and its resources. A respondent stated they were always ready and willing to work on certain days while sometimes they were not forth coming with the provision of the right information to the patrons. Thereby just directing the user to the shelf. This is contrary to the search construct which emphasizes on aiding patrons find information to meet their information needs. These mixed reactions highlight a fundamental issue with the provision of services, as such experiences portray a questionable conduct of librarianship. Thus, leading some postgraduates to stay away; "I don't go to the library because the librarians are not helpful in information search". Librarians should be encouraged to be more professional in dealing with patron and ensure they make efforts to meet the information of their users.

Responses from the respondents further showed that they were not very conversant with the working of the library and found it sometimes difficult to find the needed resources to which librarians did not always come to their aid. These responses point to the professional conduct of the librarians as not always abiding by the ethics of their profession.

Furthermore, the study sought to understand the sources responsible for the low patronage experienced. Queries showed three major categories namely;
1. Behavior of librarians
2. Mode of Dressing
3. Unfamiliar environment

Behavior of Librarians: This category discusses narratives which relate to the conduct of librarians as a source of anxiety affecting the visit and re-visit of the library. Some respondents noted a couple of personal experiences in which the librarians were unfriendly as a result they resorted to no longer visit the library. Such responses are indicative of the fact that Librarians' attitudes towards discharging their duty are poor, and this has affected the way postgraduate students perceive the library. The result of such unfriendly approach towards the users had created an atmosphere of anxiety amongst current and prospective postgraduate students. These users could further deter their colleagues from going to visit the library as they feel frightened to ask librarians for assistance.

Mode of Dressing: This category discusses narratives that described the user's past experiences with regards their attires. A respondent noted a scenario linked to the dress code of the University where the respondent recounted their ordeal with librarians at the entrance of the library building as a result of their attire. Their attire could be regarded as inappropriate or seen as a security risk. One particular respondent further stated that as a result of their mode of dressing they were denied entry into the library building. This was at a time of insecurity where bombs were concealed in clothing and attires. Thus, some postgraduate students shied away from the library as a result of their mode of dressing and the approach they received at the library resulting in low patronage of library services.

Unfamiliar Environment: This category reveals narratives which reveal poor acquaintance with the library arrangement and environs. The narratives depict a knowledge deficiency in the users as they lack the requisite know-how to search and obtain resources in the library. This deficiency has resulted in frustration as users tend to seek other means of locating information resources. A respondent noted that they could not bother going to the library and get frustrated moving about looking for information. They would rather use the internet in their search for information. Other responses obtained in this category showed that users were unfamiliar with the classification arrangement. This could be as a failure of the library to carry out information literacy skills or familiarize their users with their resources.

How the Durrance Theory of Willingness to Return explain the Perceptions of Postgraduate Students on Staff of Library Services of Kashim Ibrahim Library

The theory of willingness to return delves on the communication between the librarian and a user. It was based on the belief that for a user to return to the library for the second time, this means that there was great satisfaction to the user (Durrance, 1989, 1995). The theory is used to explain and understand the nature of the interaction that occur between the user and the information provider and reasons why users would seek to return or not return to the library environment.

Approachability

This construct deals with contact between the librarian and his user, it discusses the manner in which the user is greeted and the willingness to help of the librarian. Dervin (1986) also states approachability behaviors, such as the initial verbal and non-verbal responses of the librarian will set the tone for the entire communication process. This will influence the depth and level of interaction between the librarian and the users. The construct shows what is deemed as ideal and relates to the category professional conduct, mode of dressing and behavior of librarians. As the construct deals with approach and tells us why from the stated categories, postgraduate students will opt for any other means to solve their information needs.

Search

The search construct deals with the ability of the librarian to locate the right information as they are deemed to be more knowledgeable. The construct helps explain the category "unfamiliar environment" as it relates to their ability to find the right source of information with the aid of the librarian. Since users are not very conversant with the setting and arrangement of the library, they needed a helping hand in their search for needed information.

Summary of Findings

Based on the data collected and analyzed for this study, the following are the major findings:

1. The few relevant information resources in the library were inadequate and never available on the shelves.
2. The interview revealed that librarians were not professional in dealing with the patrons by not being involved in the information search process.
3. Unfriendly behavior of librarians towards the client discouraged them from revisiting the library.
4. The mode of dressing of postgraduate students affected the way they were addressed or attended to.
5. The study also showed that postgraduates were not very conversant with the working of the library and found it sometimes difficult to find the needed resources to which librarians did not always come to their aid.

Conclusion

Libraries provide essential information services to their academic community thereby it is essential for learning and research work of postgraduate students. however, all libraries would be neglected if they fail to attract their patron to visit and revisit. Postgraduates perceive the library services in varied lights due to experiences associated with few information resources, unprofessionalism and an unfriendly atmosphere. The theory of Durrance further explains this in its construct of approachability linked to the librarians and user behavior in the process of the librarian's service. In order to improve the visit and revisit libraries should acquire more copies of relevant books and make them available in their circulation and reserve unit. Also, the librarians should be friendlier to the users, encourage as well as guide them in searching for information resources.

Recommendations

1. The library management should as a matter of urgency make information resources sufficiently available for its users.
2. Librarians should show professionalism in dealing with the patrons by getting involved in the information search process.
3. Librarians should be approachable so as to encourage postgraduate students to revisit the library.
4. The postgraduate students should try as much as possible to dress decently so as avoid distracting librarians which in turn will make the librarians to attend to their issues.
5. Seminars should be organized for postgraduate students so as to get them acquainted with the working of the library.

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